

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
MCE-00 EB-08 TRSE-00 ACDA-12 OMB-01 /097 W
-----052780 160659Z /10

R 160504Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY SANA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5356
INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
AMEMBASSY MANAMA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE
CHUSMTM DHAHRAN
USMTM RIYADH
SECDEF WASHDC

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SANA 3454

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, YE
SUBJ: ARMS FOR YEMEN AND THE SOVIETS

BEGIN SUMMARY: UNDER GHASHMI YAR APPARENTLY CONCLUDED TWO ARMS
DEALS RECENTLY, ONE WITH FRENCH AND ONE WITH POLES, THE
LATTER WITHOUT SAUDI KNOWLEDGE OR APPROVAL. YAR NEED FOR WEAPONS
MEANS, ACCORDING TO ALI ABDALLAH SALIH, THAT SOVIETS WILL
STAY UNTIL YAR NEEDS ARE MET FROM ANOTHER SOURCE. END SUMMARY.

1. WHEN I SAW ALI ABDALLAH SALIH ON 12 JULY, I ASKED
HIM IF HE COULD CONFIRM REPORTS THAT TANKS AND OTHER
TRACKED VEHICLES -- ANTI-AIRCRAFT WEAPONS SPECIFICALLY --
HAD BEEN DELIVERED FROM POLAND IN ONE SHIP THAT ARRIVED
BEFORE DEATH OF GHASHMI AND TWO THAT CAME AFTERWARD.

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HE SAID TANKS HAD COME PRIOR TO ASSASSINATION BUT MADE
POINT -- PROBABLY OUT OF LOYALTY TO HIS SLAIN COLLEAGUE
-- THAT THESE DELIVERIES FLOWED FROM AGREEMENT MADE IN
NOVEMBER 1975 BY ABDALLAH ABD AL ALIM. FINALLY, WITH
SOME MORE QUESTIONS, HE ADMITTED THAT SOME SHIPS
HAVE COME SINCE DEATH TOO.

2. WE HAVE EYE-WITNESS CONFIRMATION OF FIRST SHIP AND ITS EQUIPMENT BUT NOT OF NEXT TWO SHIPS -- EVEN THOUGH DATT SECURITY ASSISTANT RETURNED JULY 11 FROM HODEIDA WHERE HE TOURED HARBOR AND QUERIED FRIENDLY SOURCES IN SHIPPING BUSINESS. BUT, FROM OTHER SOURCES IN SANA, IN YAR INTELLIGENCE, FOR INSTANCE, AND FROM RENASCENT FIGURE OF AHMED ABDO SAID, WE GET STORY THAT GHASHMI, WHO WANTED ARMOR AND AIR DEFENSE ABOVE ALL, WAS ABLE SOMEHOW TO NEGOTIATE DEAL THROUGH SOVIETS FOR POLES TO SHIP ARMORED VEHICLES (T-55'S AND ZSU-23'S AS WELL AS GRAIL SA-7 SHOULDER FIRED ANTI-AIR ROCKETS). WE DON'T KNOW HOW MANY. LAST WERE FLOWN IN FROM WARSAW ON FLIGHTS SEVERAL MONTHS AGO. WE FOUND OUT ABOUT FLIGHTS AT TIME BUT COULD NOT GET DETAILS. IN LAST WEEK, SAUDIS HERE QUERIED US NERVOUSLY ABOUT THIS DEAL. THEY DIDN'T HAVE DETAILS.

3. ALL THIS EQUIPMENT WAS DELIVERED TO GHASHMI HOME IN DHAL'A, 20 MINUTES NORTH OF SANA IN HEAVILY CULTIVATED VALLEY WHICH, OVER EIGHT MONTHS OF GHASHMI RULE, HAD GRADUALLY BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO FORTIFIED BASTION WITH SPECIAL BRIGADES OF SEVERAL THOUSAND MEN FROM GHASHMI'S HAMDAN TRIBE. SA-7'S, AT LEAST, ARE STILL THERE, STORED IN ONE OF MANY STONE AND MUD SKYSCRAPERS WHICH DOT THE MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPE. ALI ABDALLAH SALIH TOLD ME HE HAD CONTROL OF ALL THE EQUIPMENT BUT HE DIDN'T SAY IT WAS
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OUT OF DHAL'A YET. (WE HAD EARLIER REPORT -- PARTLY CREDIBLE IN YEMEN -- THAT MOHAMMED GHASHMI, BROTHER OF SLAIN PRESIDENT, HAD WANTED AFTER ASSASSINATION TO KEEP ALL POLISH EQUIPMENT FOR HIS OWN. IN ANY CASE, SOME OF IT IS DEFINITELY STILL IN DHAL'A.)

4. ACCORDING TO AHMED ABDO SAID THERE IS ALSO A FRENCH ARMS DEAL, SPRINGING APPARENTLY FROM VISIT WHICH COMPLETED WEEK OR SO BEFORE GHASHMI DEATH BY HIGH-RANKING YEMENI MILITARY DELEGATION. FRENCH HERE HAVE RELUCTANTLY AND CONDITIONALLY CONFIRMED THAT DEAL EXISTS. SAID SAYS THAT ABD AL-AZIZ ABD AL-GHANI HAS CONFIRMED THAT, ONCE AGAIN, THAT JUNAYD LAUNDERED THE MONEY, \$15 MILLION FOR GROUND TO AIR ROCKETS OF SOME KIND. DELIVERY CIRCUMSTANCES ARE UNKNOWN. SAID IS USUALLY RIGHT ON THESE TYPES OF QUESTIONS BUT WORTH NOTING THAT WE HAVE LITTLE ADDITIONAL CONFIRMATION OF FRENCH DEAL. I DID NOT ASK ALI ABDALLAH SALIH.

5. INSTEAD, WITH SALIH, I EXPLORED QUESTION OF SOVIET ARMS DELIVERIES. ARE THEY FROZEN? YES, HE SAID, REPEATING A REMARK HE HAD VOLUNTEERED IN OUR FIRST MEETING.

WHY DO THEY WANT TO PROVIDE YOU WEAPONS? ARE THEY
SINCERE IN WANTING TO SUPPORT YOU, PARTICULARLY AGAINST
THE SOUTH? NO, BUT I HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE, SAID SALIH.

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AS SOON AS THE US AND SAUDI ARABIA PROVIDE AN ALTERNA-
TIVE, THE SOVIETS WILL GO. IN THE MEANTIME, IF THEY
GIVE ME ON BATTALION OF SOMETHING, AND THE SOUTH
THREE, I AM STILL AHEAD. IS THE SOVIET MILITARY MISSION
A DANGER TO YOU? HERE I REPEATED THE STORY WHICH, FOR
SOME REASON, THE SOVIET MILITARY ATTACHE HAD TOLD OUR
ATTACHE: THE DEATH OF GHASHMI WAS AN INTERNAL COUP,
NOT PLOTTED FROM ABROAD, AND THE MAN WHO BENEFITED
FROM THIS PLOT WAS ALI ABDALLAH SALIH. RUMORS DON'T AFFECT
THIS GOVERNMENT, SAID ALI ABDALLAH SALIH. DO THE
SOVIETS REALLY HELP YOU? IS THEIR TRAINING ROLE, OR
MAINTENANCE ROLE SO IMPORTANT? SALIH HESITATED, THEN
SAID HE DIDN'T LIKE THEM, THEY WOULDN'T GET IN TO SEE
HIM WHEREAS I COULD CALL HIM DIRECTLY, ANY TIME, FOR
ANYTHING, AND HE WOULD SEE ME AT ONCE. BUT THERE HAD
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TO BE A COMMITMENT FROM US AND THE SAUDIS IN ORDER TO
DISPENSE WITH THE SOVIETS.

7. COMMENT: THIS IS EXACTLY THE SAME LINE I HAVE HEARD
IN PAST FROM HAMDI AND GHASHMI AND, IN LAST TWO WEEKS,
FROM PRESIDENT AL-ARASHI, PARAMOUNT SHAYKH ABDALLAH
BIN HUSSAIN AL-AHMAR, PM ABD AL-GHANI, MOUJAHID ABU
SHUWARIB, YAHYA JAGHMAN, EVEN ABDALLAH AL-ASNAJ AND
YAHYA AL-MUTAWAKKIL, ALTHOUGHT EH LAST TWO HAVE GONE
ON TO SAY THAT, YES, IN PRINCIPLE, THEY AGREED THAT
DECISION MUST BE TAKEN NOW THAT THE SOVIET MILITARY
MISSION MUST NOW GO.

8. I USUALLY RESPOND WITH QUESTIONS LIKE THOSE I ASKED
ALI ABDALLAH SALIH, OR OBSERVATIONS THAT, AS PRACTICAL
MATTER, IT WILL BE HARD TO CARRY OUT PROGRAM OF RE-
TRAINING AND RE-EQUIPMENT IF SOVIET MISSION IS HERE TO
COMPETE AND OBSTRUCT. WHILE I MAKE CLEAR OUR AID IS
UNCONDITIONAL, I ALSO SAY THAT TIME MAY HAVE COME, WITH
THREAT FROM SOUTH, FOR YAR TO MAKE CHOICE OF FRIENDS
RATHER THAN SEEK TO PLAY WITH SOVIETS.

9. AIM IN THESE CONVERSATIONS -- WHICH I KEEP VERY
LOW KEY -- IS TO KEEP QUESTION UNDER CONSIDERATION
UNTIL SAUDIS AND WE CAN PRESENT YAR WITH DETAILS OF
STEPS AND PROGRAM THAT CAN BE CALLED ALTERNATIVE AND
SATISFY YEMENI HUNGER FOR EQUIPMENT.
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